DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 358 487 CS 213 982

AUTHOR	Estrin, Herman A.
TITLE	Teaching Minority Students To Write Effectively. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Bloomington, IN.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-CS-93-06
PUB DATE	93
CONTRACT	RR9300211
NOTE	3p.
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, England, and Communication, Indiana University, 2805 E. 10th St., Suite 150, Bloomington, IN 47408-2698.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Cultural Differences; *Minority Groups; Postsecondary Education; Self Concept; Self Esteem; *Student Needs; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests; *Writing Development

ABSTRACT

Noting that many beginning students in urban public colleges and technical schools are members of minority groups, this digest offers a six-step approach to teaching these students how to write effectively. Steps in the approach described in the digest are: (1) instruct students to consider the purpose of writing, write a central idea for the composition, and develop and use an outline; (2) help students select relevant topics using anthologies specific to their culture; (3) encourage students to write with effectiveness and success; (4) use class discussion of papers to improve writing techniques; (5) have students revise their papers; and (6) instill self-confidence and a knowledge of self-identity in students. The digest lists the effects of the approach on students and presents selections written by students. (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ERIC Digest

Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication EDO-CS-93-06

D83

ED358487

Teaching Minority Students To Write Effectively

By Herman A. Estrin

Today, many beginning students in urban public colleges and technical schools are members of minority groups. Such is the case at New Jersey Institute of Technology, where I taught. To teach these high school graduates (many of whom have had very little writing practice) how to write a composition effectively, we have to dispel their fear of writing, give them something to write about to encourage them to write with success, and instill in each student self-confidence, dignity, and a sense of self-worth.

To accomplish these goals, the following six-step approach is effective:

1. **Instruct students how to write a composition by:**
   a. Choosing an appropriate subject and limiting it.
   b. Considering the purpose of writing.
   c. Writing a central idea of the composition.
   d. Developing a working plan or an outline before writing the composition.
   e. Using the outline as a tool in writing.

2. **Help students select relevant topics in writing a composition.**

Students often complain: "What can I write about?" "How can I write 500 words on that subject?" "How can I quote from the literature which I want to write about?"

To help solve these problems, the students I taught (most of whom were Black) were encouraged to use the anthology *Black Culture: Reading and Writing Black*, edited by Glorina M. Simmons and Helene D. Hutchinson (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston). This text caught the students' interests immediately because of its timely topics, provocative selections, and realistic illustrations. Contents include:

- The beauty of Black;
- On Blackness, things Black, and beautiful; Black woman, Black Man, and language of soul;
- Jive, Black power is Black language;
- Language and revolution;
- Self-hate;
- Rage;
- The why of violence;
- Ideology;
- Separation, integration, violence;
- Black heritage;
- Songs of the beloved homeland;
- Stolen heritage.

3. **Encourage students to write with effectiveness and with success.**

To accomplish this goal, my students worked on a theme-writing assignment based on the readings in *Black Culture*. In a two-hour session, students reacted orally to the readings. Some gave oral interpretations of the poetry or prose selections. Others participated in the pros and cons of the thesis of each selection. Enthusiasm, fervor, and interest permeated the discussions.

To give students the "sweet smell of success" in writing their compositions, remember that students are not professional writers. Avoid undue harsh criticism and caustic remarks. Some students have admitted that writing was a painful experience for them because throughout their secondary school careers, they received mainly unfavorable criticism on their papers (Fox, 1992).

Look for positive aspects in ideas and writing approaches while, at the same time, comment, raise questions, stimulate the student to further thought, recommend a relevant text or article, and make suggestions to help students revise their compositions. A brief word of praise helps reward each student for the labor of writing.

4. **Use class discussion of papers to improve writing techniques.**

In class discussions, comment on the students' themes but provide anonymity to the writer. This encourages an atmosphere of respect and acceptance of students' opinions, values, and ideas. From the corrected "batch" of compositions, teach style, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, organization, and sentence structure (Delpit, 1991 & 1987; Spikes & Spikes, 1983). When the students see the words, sentences, and the paragraphs which they and their peers have written, the study of how to rephrase becomes a more meaningful experience in both language and composition.

Herman A. Estrin is Professor Emeritus of English at New Jersey Institute of Technology. *This Digest was adapted from an article in NJEA Review.*

5. Have students revise their papers in keeping with the suggestions made by the instructor and other students.

Emphasize that a well-written paper has to be revised several times and that to have a well-written paper, one must proofread for misspelling and for punctuation and grammatical errors. In addition, stress that when a writer is revising and rewriting, a maturation in writing can be seen. In this process the student learns to rearrange words and sentences, eliminate redundancies, subordinate sentences and clauses, obtain a variety of sentences, and use transitional devices.

6. Instill self-confidence and present a knowledge of the self-identity of each student and a dignity of the worth of each student's personality. Frisk (1989) and Gourdine (1991) reiterate the importance of this tenet.

Many students in class discussions stated that they found it difficult to identify themselves and to discover their worth as a personality. Some indicated that in a few of their high-school classes they were "talked down to by peers," were made to feel that they were doomed to failure, and believed that they had no academic skill or talent. After having read and discussed the text, one student wrote:

"It (the book) helps attain the desire to say that you are proud of being a Black person, a desire to say that you are someone valuable to the society, and the desire to say that you are someone who cares, shares, feels, thinks, talks, and handles himself like a true person should with dignity and pride. The book is a practical experience because you learn to experience the different emotions that the book contains, such as fear, hate, love, pride, courage, and an entire mixture of emotions shared by a mistreated society for a hundred years. This itself is Black culture, an assortment of emotions and values that the Black man must read to be a person to whom everyone can look up. When you say, 'I am proud 'cause I'm Black,' then you are truly a Black person in the best of all possible ways in soul and in heart."

Another student wrote:

"Black is a beautiful color. Barbara McBrain makes this fact very clear in her poem 'What Color Is Black.' She makes me realize that there is something special and unique about being Black. Listening and reading all the bad things about being Black is what I have been exposed to all of my life. But now to read some of the good things about being Black has embedded in this person a sense of pride yes, pride in knowing that I am somebody and that my color is beautiful."

This approach to the teaching of composition:

- dispelled the students' fear of writing a composition;
- taught them the techiques of writing, proofreading, and revising their compositions;
- increased their awareness of what to write;
- encouraged students to write with effectiveness and success;
- gave individualized attention to each student's composition;
- enlivened the class periods with discussions about style, grammar, usage, organization, sentence structure, punctuation, and vocabulary;
- instilled self-confidence in each student so that the student approached writing assignments with a positive attitude.

Note these selections written by students:

". . . The ways of life are of old and new; yet each is very interrelated. The fact that in both eras the Black man survived, and yet made his surroundings pleasant, seems in itself a feat. The Black man made his environment something for himself. The old way of life was to be the beginning of the emerging of a new society that will always have a unity with itself and with the Black man. To read the poem and silently think of the deep meaning gives one a sense of desire to relate to the book and to other people."

A non-Black wrote this opinion of the text:

"For 300 years, the ritual and artistic freedom of Blacks has been covered by the cloud of racial discrimination and misunderstanding between the whites and the Blacks . . . It is amazing to learn of the great number of Black writers in this contemporary era, such as Langston Hughes, W.E.B. DuBois, LeRoy Jones, Eldridge Cleaver, and Henry Simmons. These writers are picking momentum and audacity and lean towards a new kind of revolution, a revolution that speaks of Black image, of Black rhythm, of Black bravery, and of Black compassion. Another important factor concerning these writers is that they effectively give the reader a taste of the real power of Black language."

References

"A Conversation with Lisa Delpit" (1991). *Language Arts*, 68(7) 541-47. [EJ 434 262]

Delpit, Lisa D. (1987). "Skills and Other Dilemmas of a Progressive Black Educator." *Equity and Choice*, 3(2) 9-14. [EJ 355 128]

Fox, Thomas (1992). "Repositioning the Profession: Teaching Writing to African American Students." *Journal of Advanced Composition*, 12(2) 291-303. [EJ 447 097]

Frisk, Philip (1989). "Black English and the Henry Higgins Project: Avoiding Disempowering Intervention into Black English." Paper presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Seattle, WA. [ED 348 673]

Gourdine, Angeletta K. M. (1991). "Exploring the Rhetoric of Resistance." *Writing Instructor*, 10(3) 136-42. [EJ 435 574]

Spikes, W. Curtis and Lerah A. Spikes (1983). "Development of a College Curriculum to Enhance Essay Writing Skills at a Predominantly Black College." *Journal of Negro Education*, 53(2) 110-17. [EJ 282 241]

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. USDERR93002011. Contractors undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgment in professional and technical matters. Points of view or opinions, however, do not necessarily represent the official view or opinions of the Office of Educational Research and Improve-